Building a Tobacco-free World

Address by
James P. Grant
Executive Director of the
United Nations Children's Fund
(UNICEF)

to the
Eighth World Conference
on Tobacco or Health

Buenos Aires, Argentina
30 March 1992

unicef

READEX FICHE best copy available

Speaking in Buenos Aires on 30 March 1992 before leading scientists, public health officials and representatives of the world's foremost anti-smoking advocacy organizations, UNICEF Executive Director James P. Grant pleaded "the special cause of the world's children...who have a unique vulnerability to the effects, the lure and the licence of tobacco's uses—and to the enticing messages of tobacco's promoters." While striving for a tobacco-free planet, he said the world should seek an end to all tobacco advertising and promotion by the year 2000, or even earlier. In the interim, as one of several urgent measures, he proposed that efforts be concentrated on securing, by the end of 1993, *a ban on the use of all cartoons and other images that target children and youth in tobacco advertising and promotion*. By 1995, *all* countries, provinces and municipalities should have legislation on the books banning tobacco sales to children and strictly prohibiting *all* smoking on school premises. He suggested that in building the movement for a tobacco-free world, emphasis must be placed on *prevention through education*, with the focus on children and youth.

Building a Tobacco-free World

It is a great pleasure for me to be here in solidarity with you today and to have the opportunity to address an issue that we at UNICEF consider to be of critical importance in this decade of the 1990s: smoking and children, in the context of the urgent need to promote healthy lifestyles and self-health as part of efforts to attain the international target of Health for All by the year 2000, and to achieve the goals for children adopted at the historic World Summit for Children in September 1990.

I come before you to applaud and support your crusade to build a tobacco-free world and to join my voice with yours in protest against those who would defend the practice of smoking tobacco on any conceivable grounds. I would like to take this opportunity to thank President Menem and the Government of Argentina for hosting this important gathering and giving it even greater weight and relevance.

As industrial and developing countries alike search for new paradigms for financing health systems that effectively ensure coverage of *all* people, increasing emphasis is being given to *prevention* of ill health and to the role that individuals and families must play in preserving their own health, vitality and productivity. The logic of this trend is impeccable. I remember that Bill Foege, when he was the head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control in the early 1980s, used to point out that medical interventions to add a single year to the life expectancy of the average American male would cost more than US$10 billion annually. But, he said, we could add *eleven years*—today it would be somewhat less—if we would do four *cost-free* things: stop smoking, moderate alcohol intake, watch the quality and quantity of food intake, and do a moderate amount of exercise. And today we would add, 'practice safe sex'.

This simple prescription for vastly improving people's health used to apply mainly to the rich

countries, where chronic diseases—the so-called diseases of affluence—account for the bulk of premature deaths and illness. But today, numerous countries of the developing world are making the demographic-epidemiological transition, leaving them with the double burden of transmissible *and* chronic disease—without having attained the affluence that would help them ease the burden.

Whenever we talk about human health and, especially, self-health, it's clear to me—and certainly to every individual in this room—that the words 'smoking' and 'health' stand in stark and utter contradiction to each other, inconceivable, incomprehensible and yes, indefensible.

And yet, every day, in every part of the world, smoking *is* defended. More than that, it is openly encouraged, promoted, marketed and merchandised—often in the name of economics and, more often, and more sadly—in the name of some perverse pursuit of individual freedom, happiness, success, sophistication, glamour or maturity. North American tobacco companies alone spent more than US$2 billion last year just in advertising! Even governments which discourage smoking among their own citizens support the export of tobacco products to other countries!

The most grotesque juxtaposition, however, comes when the word 'children' is added. Together, 'health, smoking and children' form the ultimate contradiction. I come before you today to plead the special cause of the world's children, that one quarter of the earth's population who have a unique vulnerability to the effects, the lure and the licence of tobacco's uses—and to the enticing messages of tobacco's promoters.

Eighteen months ago, at United Nations Headquarters in New York, the children of the world were the subject of an extraordinary World Summit—the first of the post Cold War era and the first ever of leaders of North, South, East and West. Children's needs, their rights, their critical importance to our collective future, were all affirmed by 71 heads of State and Government including President Menem, plus senior representatives of another 88 countries, who put their signatures to a Declaration and Plan of Action committing themselves and their Govern-

ments to the achievement of 27 specific and measurable goals within strict time limits. This is an unprecedented social action programme to be carried out on a global scale, and present trends on smoking work against it in many parts of the world.

By the year 2000—less than eight years from now, may I remind you—the plan calls for ambitious but doable goals, such as:

- reduction of infant and child mortality by one third;
- reduction of malnutrition by one half;
- universal access to safe drinking water and sanitary human waste disposal;
- reduction of illiteracy by one half, and universal access to primary education.

Given the harmful effects of smoking on foetuses and children, and on families as a whole, any significant reduction in smoking would contribute to reaching several of our goals for children by the end of the decade. Many of you are scientists and researchers, and you know far more than I about the devastating effects of tobacco use on human health. Perhaps, however, I can bring to this conference a point of view, a perspective grounded in the needs and rights of the world's young people to pursue healthy and productive lives.

One of the most ominous trends I have been made aware of recently on the subject of youthful lifestyles is contained in the U.S. Surgeon General's latest report, *Smoking and Health in the Americas*, issued just three weeks ago and co-sponsored by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). Dr. Antonia Novello, the U.S. Surgeon General, and Dr. Carlyle Guerra de Macedo, Director of PAHO, are here with us this week, and I am sure their illuminating report will be a focus in many of the sessions.

With 435,000 people dying every year from smoking-related diseases in the United States alone, North America is in the midst of a major epidemic, according to the report. But in Latin America and the Caribbean—and this is what I find so ominous—at least 100,000 smoking-related deaths are now occurring annually. And that number is growing. The report concludes that this part of our hemisphere is "poised to follow the same path" as its neighbours to the north. And large numbers of young people, I am

READEX
FICHE

afraid, are helping to play this 'game' of catch-up, with as many as 50 per cent of youth in some urban areas of Latin America now smoking!

The report notes that the structure of the tobacco industry in this part of the hemisphere is dominated by transnational corporations that present a formidable obstacle to smoking control efforts. And it calls for a systematic monitoring of all the various factors that influence tobacco use, so that control programmes can be put in place before the situation reaches epidemic proportions here in Latin America and the Caribbean. I vigorously concur!

Such control programmes are a major part of the WHO and UNICEF global action campaign, *Healthy Lifestyles for Youth*, which was given a major boost by the commitment made at the World Summit for Children to give children's needs a 'first call' on society's resources. This extraordinary pledge, if implemented, could radically change the way the world's resources are allocated, and UNICEF is fully committed to holding the world's political leaders to that pledge.

Programmes that help young people to make the healthy choice against the smoking habit—the choice of tobacco *or* health, as the title of this conference so bluntly puts it—are critical because the overwhelming majority of new smokers embark on their addiction (and it is demonstrably an *addiction*) before they are out of their teens. Young people, understandably, are in a hurry to be viewed as adults and smoking has for many decades been promoted as a sophisticated, 'adult' activity. Cigarette promoters have been quick to make the deadly connection with youth.

Young people between the ages of 10 and 24, representing one third of the world's peoples, and whose numbers are growing 50 per cent faster than the earth's total population, are highly susceptible to the myriad messages communicated in words and deeds by society, by governments, by peers and parents, by private sector businesses—indeed, by the very culture in which these young people grow up and form the habits of a lifetime. Where better, then, to begin and conclude a triumphant crusade against tobacco—a crusade that could literally eliminate the menace of smoking within a generation?

Let me share with you two examples of how things seem to get accomplished in this world, at the individual and the collective level. One is about how I personally kicked the smoking habit 20 years ago. The other is how UNICEF kicked its collective smoking habit.

I had tried many times to stop smoking. In fact, I was like the man who once said, "Quitting smoking is easy. I do it every day." It was my wife who finally got through to me, in a way I simply couldn't ignore. I was leaving on one of the trips I seem to be forever taking, and her parting words to me were, "If you don't come back a non-smoker, I will move into the guest room!" That did it, and I haven't smoked since.

As for UNICEF, it was simply a case of practising what we preach. In 1986, the 39th World Health Assembly affirmed all of the facts we now take for granted about the disastrous impact of smoking on health. And it called on all components of the UN system to support WHO efforts to curtail the spread of tobacco-induced diseases by protecting the health of non-smokers on their premises. As advocates for the health of the world's children and youth, we could hardly carry water on both shoulders—that is, be against smoking and continue to pollute our own lungs and work spaces. We held meetings, we issued memos, we disseminated information, we organized cessation classes, and we set a target date for implementation. By World Health Day, 7 April 1987, smoking was prohibited throughout UNICEF except for small, isolated lounge areas designated for those who had yet to kick the habit. And three years later, the smoking lounges were gone, as well, in virtually all UNICEF locations. Officially (though I am sure there are still some regressions), we had achieved a totally smoke-free working environment for our over five thousand staff members and were subsequently recognized by the American Cancer Society as the first agency in the UN system to do so.

Any successful crusade to end smoking among the world's youth must begin with the essential facts:

- Tobacco is the most commonly used and widely distributed drug in the world today.
- Young people take up smoking because they see other people do it—their peers, their parents, other

adults—because it is so widely available and so heavily promoted by economic interests, and for a variety of complex social and psychological reasons that render it difficult to convince young people of the inherent risks involved in smoking. Children have more than double the risk of becoming smokers themselves if their parents smoke.

- The earlier one acquires the smoking habit, the larger the loss in life expectancy—eight years if smoking starts at age 15, four if at age 25. As many as 90 per cent of eventual smokers start before the age of 19. If the habit is not acquired in adolescence, it rarely is later in life.
- Smokers are much more likely to become regular users of alcohol and to experiment with other drugs. This is a key lifestyle and health issue.

Each country has its own pattern of tobacco use and, for that reason, anti-smoking campaigns need to be tailored to local realities and peculiarities. Here in Argentina, according to the Argentine Anti-Cancer League, some 8 million people are smokers—with twice as many women smoking as men—a highly unusual situation. Of the 5.5 million young people between the ages of 10 and 18, more than a third of them—some 2 million—are smokers. But according to recent trends, Argentine teenagers seem to be moving away from tobacco and some, unfortunately, towards alcohol and other substance abuse.

Any successful crusade to end smoking among the world's youth must focus on helping them develop the skills needed to resist the many unhealthy encouragements and pressures that surround them, particularly the lures and traps set by the worldwide tobacco industry. But this help cannot be given in isolation. Attention must be paid to a wide variety of measures and programmes, including: health education; legal restrictions on sales, advertising and smoking in public places; and significant changes in fiscal, pricing and agricultural subsidy policies.

As a practical matter, society must condemn the use of tobacco, progressively reduce the ubiquitous availability of tobacco products and their promotion, and send a clear message to the world's youth that "smoking is out"—socially, psychologically, environmentally and economically. I see signs that this is

starting to happen. Let me cite one example.

Many of you are aware of the controversy currently raging in the United States—dramatized by Surgeon General Novello—over a cartoon character named 'Old Joe' which the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company uses to promote the sale of its Camel cigarettes. It is well known to all of you, of course, that children and youth are particularly susceptible to advertising messages in general. And the use of cartoons, which are universally associated with children, is an especially effective way of reaching the young.

The Old Joe ads—which I understand also appear here in Argentina, as well as many other countries—are insidious. Studies published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* show that 30 per cent of three-year-olds—yes, I said three-year-olds—recognize Old Joe and match his picture with a picture of a cigarette. Three years later, at the age of six, that recognition figure has risen to 91 per cent! With the power of the advertising purse behind him, Old Joe has accomplished in just a few years what it took Mickey Mouse more than a generation to do.

R. J. Reynolds vigorously denies that this advertising is intentionally beamed at children, and cites its rights to what it calls 'commercial free speech'. But the American Medical Association (AMA) concludes otherwise. In a study to determine if Old Joe's message is more effective with children or adults, they reported that children were better able to identify the product and the brand name being advertised, and they found the ads more appealing than adults. "Camel's share of the illegal children's cigarette market segment has increased from 0.5 per cent to 32.8 per cent," the AMA states, a gain that "represents sales estimated at US$476 million per year." The AMA study concludes, "Old Joe Camel cartoon advertisements are far more successful at marketing Camel cigarettes to children than to adults. This finding is consistent with tobacco industry documents that indicate that a major function of tobacco advertising is to promote and maintain tobacco addiction among children."

The U.S. medical community has been outraged over this issue, leading the Surgeon General and the

President of the AMA to hold a well-publicized press conference recently calling for an end to such exploitive advertising that targets youth. Even the advertising industry itself has begun to come out against Old Joe. Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, President of the American Council on Science and Health, believes the Old Joe Camel's campaign may well be "the metaphorical straw that broke the advertising camel's back", in other words, the beginning of the end for tobacco advertising.

Would the world countenance sophisticated ad campaigns promoting the sniffing of glue, the fatal combination of drinking and driving, or the use of drugs that poison rather than relieve illness? Is tobacco promotion any less abhorrent? Would we permit the introduction and promotion of cigarettes as a new product today, knowing what we now know about its harmful effects?

The answer, clearly, is *no, no, no*, but the fact is that we are dealing with a long-established product, a multi-billion dollar industry, and a widespread practice that has long been promoted as socially attractive and even beneficial to individual health. Overcoming such a legacy, therefore, represents a major challenge to society and requires the development of sophisticated strategies on a variety of fronts.

First, there's what you and I can do, personally, to further this crusade. All of us have homes and many of us have children. *Are we setting the right example in our personal lives?* There's no place like home for inculcating healthy habits and the self-esteem required to maintain them.

Second, most of us work in offices or other organized settings. How well are non-smokers protected there, and isn't there more we can do to insure their protection? Every time a group of people huddles to grab a smoke outside a building that has banned smoking, the message is reinforced that smoking is no longer acceptable. WHO has proclaimed 31 May as World No-Tobacco Day, and this year the emphasis is on tobacco-free workplaces. I think that's an excellent theme and one that each of us can push where we work and spend so much of our lives. As I mentioned earlier, UNICEF is now, and has been for some years, a tobacco-free workplace worldwide.

Third, there are the schools which our children attend. Experience has shown that aggressive anti-smoking policies in schools can be effective. This means that a strong, healthy lifestyles curriculum must be backed up by a total ban on smoking not only by students, but by teachers and parents, on school grounds, during and after school. Schools and youth clubs can organize friendly competitions with one another to see who can become tobacco-free first and remain that way. In 1978, an association of young people was formed in Sweden with the primary goal of having their schools free of smoke. Today, there are some 60 local chapters working in their communities and schools arranging non-smoking dances, outings, sports activities and exhibits. This kind of action is particularly important because it helps counteract the sponsorship of sporting events, rock concerts and other youth-oriented activities by the tobacco industry.

Fourth—and moving further into the community and society—there is the influence each of us and our organizations can bring to bear in favour of broad, effective bans on smoking in public places. Smoking has now been prohibited on all U.S. domestic airline flights. This should be replicated in every country and extended to international flights. In Nigeria, there is a prohibition against smoking in public places that is rather effective. In Finland, I understand, it is against the law to smoke in the vicinity of a pregnant woman. Legislation and regulation alone won't do the job, however; we must harness the communications revolution of our times to ensure that the anti-smoking message reaches and motivates growing numbers of individuals to reject tobacco use themselves, and to influence friends and family to stop smoking. We must also demand that responsible authorities enact and then take anti-smoking bans in public places seriously, enforcing them on a sustained basis. There is nothing more undermining than 'rules' that are routinely ignored, especially by those responsible for their enforcement.

Fifth, in building our movement for a tobacco-free world, we have to emphasize ***prevention through education*** and focus our prevention and education efforts on children and youth. Just as the leaders who

attended the World Summit for Children realized that human development requires putting children first, so we must put children first in our work for healthy lifestyles. Since the international community has set a wide range of goals for radically improving children's lives by the year 2000—a year imbued with great symbolism as a divide between past and future—could we not commit ourselves to reaching a series of major anti-smoking goals leading up to that year as well?

While striving for our tobacco-free world, I would propose we seek an end to all tobacco advertising and promotion by the year 2000, or even earlier, if possible. In many countries there are already effective bans on cigarette advertisements on radio and television. A complete end to all promotional campaigns and advertising would be a major step towardss our ultimate goal. This would be particularly helpful in the developing countries, which have been targeted for saturation ad campaigns by the tobacco industry.

But as an urgent measure, *I suggest we concentrate our efforts on securing an immediate ban in all forms of promotion and advertising on the use of all cartoons and other images that target children and youth.* To cloak pro-smoking messages in images of health and playfulness that are inherently appealing to children is unspeakably unethical and it must be immediately stopped. Whatever the *intent* of the cigarette promoters has been, the damaging *impact* of such campaigns on the health of youth is quite clear.

I believe we are reaching a critical mass of public opinion on this front that could be sufficient to obtain a cut-off of such ads in a very short time—hopefully, well before the end of 1993. (We should also push for an end to sales of 'candy cigarettes' which, according to a recent study, also condition children to think of smoking as something acceptable and normal, even beneficial. I'm not certain how universal 'candy cigarettes' are, but I've seen them sold in a number of countries around the globe.)

Where laws exist prohibiting the sale of tobacco products to minors, enforcement needs to be strengthened and, in some cases, penalties should be

made more severe to dissuade potential violators. Why not set the goal of all countries, provinces and municipalities having legislation on the books by, say, 1995, banning tobacco sales to children and strictly prohibiting all smoking on school premises?

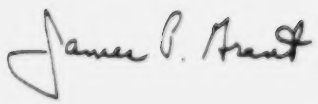
Other longer-term actions will be necessary. Just as we are now talking about converting military industries for civilian uses in this post-Cold War world—and talking about helping farmers make the change from illicit drug crops to much-needed food production—we should examine ways to help the tobacco agro-industry make a similar transition, in the interest of society as a whole. Tobacco is produced in 120 countries and 63 per cent of the world crop is grown in developing countries, representing a means of livelihood for millions of families. This, however, can no longer be offered as justification for continuing tobacco promotion, any more than the economic dependence on coca could be used as justification to promote the use of cocaine.

As we look forward, let me remind you how far we have already come, thanks in great part to the efforts of you in this room.

- Smoking in most developed countries is failing; the anti-smoking message, as well as economic realities, are beginning to reduce tobacco consumption in parts of the third world, particularly in Africa.
- The diversification of tobacco companies around the world into other products also affirms their own appreciation that, despite their denials about the obvious causal connections between smoking, disease and death, they know only too well that the handwriting is on the wall and that tobacco profits will be dwindling as global consciousness increases.
- It has already been demonstrated, in Finland, Nigeria, Poland, the United Kingdom, the United States and other countries, that smoking can be banished from public buildings, from workplaces, restaurants and meeting places.
- Smoking advertisements no longer appear on television or radio in many countries.
- And finally, the fact that many children and youth are becoming the world's most militant anti-smoking activists should be a source of hope and encouragement.

I commend you for this conference. I commend you for your presence here. I commend you for the work and the values that bring you here. I urge you to carry on and redouble your efforts, because *they are working.*

We are indeed moving towards a tobacco free world. And as we continue that progress, I implore you to set targets with dates and to put children first in your efforts.



James P. Grant
Executive Director
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

---

30 March 1992